

Graduation Rate: 4-Year Cohort
Model talking points—external audience

Question: *If your district is reporting a graduation rate of 82%, that means 18% of your students are drop-outs, right?*

A decrease in the “on-time” graduation rate does not necessarily mean that more students are dropping out of school.

The graduation rate now reports the number of students who have graduated within 4 years and are “on time” according to the state and federal government. We know that another [--%] are on track to graduate in the near future. Another [--%] have transferred to other schools or out of state.

Question: *So what is your real drop-out rate?*

Once all our graduates, both “on time” and those who need more time, and transfers are counted, about [--%] of our students have actually appear to have dropped out.

Question: *Is this graduation rate/drop-out rate good enough?*

No, even one drop-out is one too many. We have a plan to reduce that rate through a number of interventions:

[Add district-specific information here.]

Question: *This graduation rate is dramatically lower than other years. What gives?*

Although the data is accurate, these numbers don’t tell the whole story. Michigan is using a new data reporting system and is measuring success against a new standard.

Question: *What is different this year in the way graduates/drop-outs are counted?*

In the past, districts were allowed to count every student who earned a diploma, no matter how long it took them to finish. Now, Michigan has joined all 50 states in reporting graduation rates of “on-time” graduates only—those who finish within 4 years with a diploma.

Question: *How important is it to graduate in 4 years?*

Research suggests that students who graduate in 4 years face a brighter future in college and on the job. That’s why we work hard to make sure all our students graduate on time.

However, just as some students require more than 4 years to finish college, some students—for a variety of reasons—will need more time to master high school level skills.

We think it’s more important for kids to earn a diploma—no matter how long it takes—than to push them out early when they get off track. .

Question: *What kinds of things keep kids from graduating on time?*

Our data shows that students take more time for a number of reasons. Some just need a slower pace of learning in order to master the content. Others are recovering from some academic setbacks or poor life choices. Others are bouncing back from long-term illnesses or frequent family moves. [add district specific stories, if appropriate.]

Question: *What are you doing to improve the graduation rate?*

We have always.....[insert district specific interventions]

Plus, we are putting some new interventions in place to help students graduate on time.

[insert district specific practices]

We know research says.....[insert facts]. So if we had unlimited resources, we would like to....[insert your wish list.]

Schools can't do everything, but we know we could do more if we had adequate resources. We hope the community will contact their legislators to make sure we have the resources we need to make sure every student graduates on time.

Question: *What about special education students? Where will they get counted?*

Many students receiving special education services will graduate with their 4-year cohort, with the help of support services provided by the district. Students whose learning or other disabilities cause them to need more time to complete the Michigan Merit Curriculum might be reported later, if approved by the Office of Special Education & Early Intervention Services.* A limited number of students with the most severe disabilities might receive certificates of completion rather than diplomas. Michigan law allows students who receive special education services access to a free and appropriate education up to age 26.**

*For the 2007 cohort, districts can request a one-year exception via the GAD application. Guidance pertaining to when exceptions are appropriate will be provided by the MDE. Approvals will be granted by the OSE-EIS. This process will also apply for the 2008 cohort class. Beginning with the 2009 cohort, the appropriate data will be collected via the student data collection system (SDS).

NOTE: Districts will only want to use this exception for those students who really need one extra year. It will not be a benefit if a student needs 2-3 more years because that student will not be considered an on-time graduate regardless.

**CEPI has not entered discussions at this time of reporting those students who complete at the age of 26.